

Message Text

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ACTION EA-12

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 OES-07 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05
H-01 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02
SS-15 ICA-11 ACDA-12 DLOS-09 IO-13 /119 W
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R 090929Z JUN 78
FM AMEMBASSY TOKYO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 8679
INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
AMEMBASSY TAIPEI
AMEMBASSY SEOUL
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMCONSUL HONG KONG
USLO PEKING
USMISSION USNATO
CINCPAC HONOLULU HI

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TOKYO 10536

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: JA, UR, CH, MORG
SUBJECT: SOVIET MANEUVERS IN SOUTHERN KURILES

1. SUMMARY: SOVIET MILITARY MANEUVERS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY
IN SOUTHERN KURILES HAVE EXCITED CONSIDERABLE PRESS
ATTENTION. GOJ HAS TAKEN GENERALLY RELAXED VIEW, HOWEVER,
AND CLEARLY DOES NOT WISH THIS TO BECOME MAJOR BILATERAL
ISSUE. END SUMMARY

2. SOVIETS INFORMED GOJ JUNE 2 THAT BECAUSE OF "FIRING
EXERCISES" IN AREA, "DANGER ZONE" WOULD BE IN EFFECT WITHIN
12 MILES OF ETOROFU ISLAND (ONE OF FOUR IN JAPAN-CLAIMED
NORTHERN TERRITORIES) BETWEEN JUNE 6 AND 12. NINETEEN
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JAPANESE FISHING BOATS IN AREA WERE ASKED TO DEPART. GOJ
IMMEDIATELY LODGED PROTEST, ASSERTING JAPANESE CLAIM TO
ETOROFU, ILLEGALITY OF SOVIETS DECLARING WATERS AROUND IT
OFF-LIMITS FOR ANY PURPOSE, AND RIGHT TO FULL COMPENSATION
FOR DAMAGE OR LOSSES SUFFERED BY JAPANESE FISHERMEN.

3. EXERCISES BEGAN ON SCHEDULE, AND ACCORDING TO PRESS

REPORTS HAVE INVOLVED NAVAL SHIP MANEUVERS IN WATERS OFF ETOROFU AND AIRLIFT OF AT LEAST 1,000 COMBAT TROOPS TO ISLAND. PRESS REPORTS DESCRIBE MANEUVERS AS "LARGE-SCALE," AND SOME HAVE SUGGESTED POLITICAL MOTIVATION, I.E., SHOW OF SOVIET FORCE WHICH WOULD DETER JAPAN FROM GOING AHEAD WITH PENDING CHINA TREATY.

4. MOFA, ON OTHER HAND, HAS ARGUED THAT EXERCISES ARE NEITHER PARTICULARLY LARGE-SCALE NOR POLITICALLY MEANINGFUL. SOVIET DIVDIR TOGO, WHO MET FOUR TIMES WITH REPORTERS JUNE 7 IN RATHER UNSUCCESSFUL EFFORT TO DAMPEN SOME OF WILDER PRESS SPECULATION, TOLD EMBOFF THAT, WHILE INFORMATION ON WHAT SOVIETS WERE ACTUALLY DOING WAS STILL INCOMPLETE, THERE DID NOT AT THIS POINT APPEAR TO BE ANY CAUSE FOR ALARM OR EVEN FOR MUCH CONTROVERSY. SOVIETS HAD PREVIOUSLY HELD MANEUVERS IN SOUTHERN KURILES IN 1964, 1969 (SIX TIMES) AND 1970 (TWICE). THIS WAS REGULAR SEASON FOR SOVIET EXERCISES IN THAT REGION, AND WHILE NONE HAD BEEN HELD AROUND ETOROFU FOR EIGHT YEARS, IT WAS DOUBTFUL THAT THIS ONE REPRESENTED BEGINNING OF DISTURBING TREND.

5. IT WAS EVEN MORE DOUBTFUL, IN TOGO'S OPINION, THAT EXERCISES HAD BEEN DESIGNED WITH JAPAN-PRC RELATIONS IN MIND, NOT ONLY BECAUSE EFFECT WOULD BE COUNTERPRODUCTIVE (TOGO REFERRED TO SOVIET CAPACITY FOR POLITICAL MISJUDGMENT WHERE JAPAN WAS CONCERNED) BUT BECAUSE THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN CONFIDENTIAL

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PLANNED FAR IN ADVANCE, AT TIME WHEN CURRENT STATE OF JAPAN-CHINA PFT DISCUSSIONS WOULD HAVE BEEN IMPOSSIBLE TO PREDICT. THUS, GOJ PROTEST HAD BEEN PRO FORMA.

6. HIGH-LEVEL GOJ SPOKESMEN, NOTABLY CHIEF CABINET SECRETARY ABE, HAVE FOR THE MOST PART HEWED TO THIS LOW-KEY AND NON-ALARMIST CHARACTERIZATION OF SOVIET ACTIVITIES. THERE IS NOT, HOWEVER, UNANIMITY WITHIN GOJ AS TO HOW TO INTERPRET AND REACT TO MANEUVERS. PRESS HAS REPORTED SOME UNNAMED GOVERNMENT SOURCES AS CALLING SOVIET ACTIVITIES "AGGRESSIVE." WHILE JDA LEADERSHIP HAS ENDORSED MOFA LINE THAT FACTS OF SITUATION WERE STILL UNCLEAR AND JUDGMENTS AS TO NATURE OF EXERCISE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS STILL PREMATURE, GENERAL KURISU, CHAIRMAN OF JOINT STAFF COUNCIL, HAS TOLD PRESS SOVIETS WERE CONDUCTING "COMBINED SIMULATED LANDING OPERATION" ON ETOROFU. JDA DEFENSE BUREAU DIRECTOR GENERAL ITO TOLD DIET QUESTIONER JUNE 8 THAT SOME OF PRESS REPORTS OF MANEUVERS SEEMED TO BE BASED ON GENERAL KURISU'S VIEWS; ITO REITERATED THAT JDA WAS RESERVING JUDGMENT.

7. CONSIDERED JAPANESE REACTION TO SOVIET ACTIVITIES

SHOULD SOON BECOME CLEARER. APPARENTLY BY COINCIDENCE, JDA HAD SCHEDULED AMPHIBIOUS EXERCISE, INVOLVING "COMBAT TEAM" (I.E., PERHAPS AS MANY AS 3,000-4,000 TROOPS), FOR EASTERN HOKKAIDO BEGINNING JUNE 12, DATE SOVIET MANEUVERS WILL END. WHILE TWO EXERCISES WOULD NOT NECESSARILY OVERLAP, EITHER IN TERMS OF TIMING OR TERRITORIES INVOLVED, THEY WOULD COME CLOSE IN BOTH RESPECTS. ACCORDING TO JDA SOURCES, EXERCISE IS FIRM. NONETHELESS, THERE COULD BE PRESSURES WITHIN GOJ TO QUIETLY POSTPONE IT (PLANS ARE NOT PUBLICLY KNOWN) AND WE SUSPECT QUESTION REMAINS SUBJECT OF SOME

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DEBATE.

8. COMMENT: WHILE SITUATION MAY BE ESSENTIALLY AS TOGO HAS DESCRIBED IT, GOJ HAS NOT ALWAYS BEEN SO QUICK TO ATTEMPT TO CORRECT MISTAKEN PUBLIC AND PRESS INTERPRETATIONS REGARDING SOVIET ACTIVITIES. WE SUSPECT CURRENT STATE OF PLAY ON PFT IS REASON FOR THIS CAUTIOUS AND CALMING APPROACH. JAPANESE WOULD PREFER THAT PFT DISCUSSIONS, TO EXTENT POSSIBLE, GO FORWARD WITHOUT CONSTANT AND DIRECT REFERENCE TO TREATY'S POSSIBLE EFFECT

ON RELATIONS WITH USSR, IN KEEPING WITH GOJ POSITION THAT
JAPAN-PRC AND JAPAN- SOVIET TIES SHOULD BE CONSIDERED
SEPARATELY ON THEIR RESPECTIVE MERITS. GOJ WISHES TO
AVOID CONFRONTATIONAL ATMOSPHERE, AND PROBABLY SEES ENOUGH
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POTENTIAL COMPLICATIONS IN RELATIONS WITH USSR IN WEEKS
AHEAD WITHOUT ALLOWING THIS TO BECOME ANOTHER. WE DOUBT
THAT SOVIET MANEUVERS WILL HAVE SIGNIFICANT EFFECT ON
IMMEDIATE PROSPECTS REGARDING PFT. HOWEVER, REGARDLESS
OF SOVIET MOTIVE, MANEUVERS ARE REMINDER, AS IF ONE WERE
NEEDED, THAT SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IS CLOSE-BY AND MUST
CONTINUALLY BE TAKEN INTO ACCOUNT IN FORMULATION OF GOJ
POLICY. MANSFIELD

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